



The Hour Before the Dawn

Dawn-Breakers Chapters 1-2

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Glimmerings notes are a companion to study of the Dawn-Breakers

Prologue

In 1800, the world was vastly different from today. Life was harsh. Amenities like running water, electricity, or gas did not exist. Travel was primarily by foot, with only a privileged few able to afford horses, donkeys, or camels. Most people only knew life in their own village. The fastest form of long-distance communication was the carrier pigeon. Most people were illiterate and feudal systems, with lords and aristocrats, kept many in a state of servitude without many rights. Religion played a significant role in people's lives, but that was mainly by blind adherence to traditional rituals and following whatever the clergy [the religious leaders] told them. Independent thought was often deemed heretical, perpetuating superstition and ignorance, contributing to a worldwide dark era.

These conditions were particularly marked in the Middle East. It was within this dark paradigm that a profound spiritual awakening began in the land of Persia [Írán]. And as with all other great changes, the initial steps were not obvious to all. It began with two Awakeners.

The two Awakeners arose in the region of modern day Iráq and Írán. At that time the Middle East was divided between two Islamic Empires: the Persian Empire ruled by the Qájár kings, and the much larger Ottoman Empire ruled by the Caliphate. Both empires were Islamic, but each followed a different branch of Islam: the Caliphate was Sunní  and the Persian Empire was Shí'a . ¹

The motive force behind the two Awakeners was their spiritual intuition that the appearance of the Promised One was imminent. He was the Promised *Qá'im* , the Promised *Mahdí* , the return of Jesus Christ. His coming would bring the Day of Resurrection. His coming would usher in the dawn of a new era for all humanity. All things would be recreated.

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¹ For a brief overview of basic tenets of Islam and the Shí'a see [Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam](#).

Section One: The First Awakener

The First Awakener: Shaykh Ahmad

Shaykh Ahmad (ﷺ) was born in 1753 in Ahsá (ﷺ) (on the east coast of Saudi Arabia).¹ When he was about forty, Shaykh Ahmad sensed that the Promised One prophesied in Islam would soon appear. He also understood that most people had lost touch with the spiritual content of the teachings of Islam and only practiced its



Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í (ﷺ) (1753 – 1826)²

¹ He is therefore known as Shaykh Ahmad-i-Ahsá'í meaning Shaykh Ahmad from Ahsá. Shaykh is a title [means elder or head] and usually used as a title for a leader of a group. Because Ahsá was part of Bahrain at the time of Shaykh Ahmad, he is sometimes also called Shaykh Ahmad-i-Bahrayní [e.g. in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 15, p276]. Ahsá is now part of the Saudi Arabia and no longer part of Bahrain.

² Archival painting from *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p1.

Shaykh Ahmad's studies and efforts in Najaf and Karbalá' led to him being accepted as a Shí'a mujtahid [a person learned in Islamic law]¹. However, as time passed, people found that Shaykh Ahmad's interpretations of Islam were a bit different from the mainstream Shí'a interpretations. This garnered him a following who became known as the Shaykhís.

Teachings of Shaykh Ahmad

Shaykh Ahmad emphasized that the *Qur'án's* narratives were in many instances metaphors. They were vehicles for conveying profound spiritual truths rather than literal narratives. One such narrative he challenged was the widely accepted literal interpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's "Night Journey," where the Prophet miraculously travels to Jerusalem and ascends through the heavens, communing with divine beings.² Shaykh Ahmad taught this was not a physical journey by the Prophet but a spiritual one. Using the same logic, Shaykh Ahmad also taught that the resurrection,³ which is promised to happen on the Day of Resurrection when the Promised One comes, is a spiritual awakening and not a physical one. Such metaphorical perspectives diverged sharply from mainstream Islamic beliefs and most people found these teachings difficult to accept and even heretical.⁴ In fact the clergy [the religious leaders] began to rise in opposition to Shaykh Ahmad's interpretations of Islamic teachings.

All this was preparation by Shaykh Ahmad, whose real intention was to create an openness of thinking in the people for the coming of the Promised One. With this in mind, Shaykh Ahmad after some years in Najaf and Karbalá' set out for Persia and visited several of its cities: Mashhad, Shíráz and eventually Yazd.

¹ *Mujtahid* means someone who is learned in Islamic law. To become a mujtahid, one has to study Islamic law under other senior learned mujtahids [studies can take many years]. The person is eventually granted the status of a mujtahid allowing them to be an authority to practice Islamic law. A mujtahid can issue *fatwas* [authorized legal opinions]. They further can take on and train other students, preach in the mosques and head congregations.

² Muslims believe that in the Night Journey of the Prophet Muhammad to the heavens. This Night Journey has two parts. In the first part [called the *Isra'*], the Prophet flew miraculously from Medina in Saudi Arabia to the Al-Aqsá mosque in Jerusalem. In the second part [called the *Mi'raj*], He then ascended from Al-Aqsá mosque to the 7th heaven in the company of Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and once there conversed with God. Virtually all Muslims believe [even today] that this Night Journey was a physical one which occurred in one night. It was therefore very challenging that Shaykh Ahmad taught that this was not a physical journey but a spiritual one, that is, it occurred in the realm of the spirit of the Prophet.

³ means the dead coming alive.

⁴ means going against the teachings of God.

Shaykh Ahmad's hints about the coming of the Promised One

Initially, Shaykh Ahmad remained reticent about his true intention, which was to herald the advent of the Promised One. As time passed, subtle hints regarding the arrival of the Promised One began to surface in his teachings, yet many of these hints went unnoticed by his followers. These hints and clues referenced:

- The city of Shíráz 
- The name 'Alí 
- The name Husayn 
- The year 1817
- The year 1819

Importance of Shíráz

One day, while visiting Shíráz (a city in south-eastern Írán), Shaykh Ahmad surprised the residents by lavishing praise on their rather modest town. He said: "Wonder not, for ere long the secret of my words will be made manifest to you. Among you there shall be a number who will live to behold the glory of a Day which the prophets of old have yearned to witness." ¹

Importance of 1819 and the name 'Alí

In 1819, Shaykh Ahmad's son, 'Alí, died. Shaykh Ahmad comforted his disciples, who mourned the loss of his son, with this riddle: "Grieve not, O my friends, for I have offered my son, my own 'Alí, as a sacrifice for the 'Alí whose advent we all await. To this end I have reared and prepared him." ²

Importance of the name Husayn

Besides constant mention and praise of this unknown 'Alí, Shaykh Ahmad also repeatedly referenced the name Husayn. His followers generally assumed he meant the Imám Husayn , the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third of the Shí'a Imáms.³ But the few who were astute realized that he was referring to a different Husayn who had yet to appear.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p4-5

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p14

³ See Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam.

Importance of 1817 and the story of 'Abdu'l-Vahháb and Hasan

A select few of Shaykh Ahmad's disciples were spiritually awakened souls, even though they weren't considered the most learned. One such person amongst the disciples in Yazd was 'Abdu'l-Vahháb ¹. Even though 'Abdu'l-Vahháb was an illiterate and simple man, Shaykh Ahmad treated him with great affection, and had frequent confidential conversations with him, which aroused the jealousy of some of the disciples who considered themselves learned.

After Shaykh Ahmad left Yazd, 'Abdu'l-Vahháb didn't associate much with Shaykh Ahmad's other disciples except for Hasan of Náyin,¹ to whom 'Abdu'l-Vahháb confided the secrets his master Shaykh Ahmad had taught him. After 'Abdu'l-Vahháb died Hasan continued to try to impress upon receptive souls among Shaykh Ahmad's disciples that they were standing on the verge of a new Revelation from God. He met with limited success.²

One of Hasan's disciples, Mahmúd ³, reported that, at sunrise one morning in 1817, he found Hasan prostrate, in wrapt devotion, repeating the words "*Alláh-u-Akbar*" ⁴ [God is Great]. Hasan turned to Mahmúd and said: "That which I have been announcing to you is now revealed. At this very hour the light of the Promised One has broken and is shedding illumination upon the world. O Mahmúd, verily I say, you shall live to behold that Day of days."⁴ Years later, after Mahmúd had become a follower of the Báb, he was puzzled because the Bab's birth was in 1819, and not 1817. What, he wondered, had happened in 1817? It took a few more years for Mahmúd to find the answer to the significance of 1817. The full story of 'Abdu'l-Vahháb, Hasan and Mahmúd is described by Nabíl in the Dawn-Breakers.⁵

The Second Awakener Emerges: Siyyid Kázim

Siyyid Kázim was born in the city of Rasht, nestled in the northern Persian province of Gílán ⁶, near the Caspian Sea, earning him the appellation Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí

¹ Hájí Hasan-i-Náyiní, *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p7

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p7

³ Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Qamsárí, *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p8

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p8

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p7-9

🔊. The title “Siyyid” denotes lineage tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad, symbolizing sacred ancestry.¹ Those with such roots often wore green turbans.

Siyyid Kázim's exceptional intellect and spiritual depth set him apart at a young age. His family were merchants of repute, but it was clear from childhood that his was a different life path. By age eleven, he had committed the entire *Qur'án* to memory, a remarkable feat. By fourteen, he had expanded his knowledge further by memorizing many thousands of *hadíth* 🔊², the revered sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and the Imáms.³ At just eighteen, he authored a commentary on the renowned verse of the *Qur'án* known as *Áyatu'l-Kursí*,⁴ earning him the admiration and respect of esteemed scholars and elders.⁵

One night, Siyyid Kázim had a dream⁶ in which the seventh Imám, Imám Músá-Kázim,⁷ appeared to him. In the dream, the Imám instructed Siyyid Kázim to seek out Shaykh Ahmad and become his disciple. Without hesitation, the 22-year-old Siyyid Kázim gathered his belongings and embarked on a lengthy journey to Yazd, where Shaykh Ahmad resided. Upon his arrival, Shaykh Ahmad immediately recognized Siyyid Kázim as the second Awakener after himself. Welcoming him warmly, Shaykh Ahmad exclaimed, “I welcome you, my friend! I have eagerly awaited your arrival to help liberate me from the arrogance of these misguided people!” He then cited a verse from the *Qur'án*: “We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: But man undertook it; and he, verily, hath proved unjust,

¹ *Siyyid* means the person is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad – which for the Shí'a is through the descendants of Imám 'Alí and Fátima [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam]. They are usually distinguished by wearing a green turban or a black turban and a green shawl or sash.

² Also called Traditions, the *hadíth* are oral sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammad and the Imáms and given very high importance – second only to the *Qur'án*. For more details on *hadíth* see Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam.

³ For the list of Imáms, see Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam. The main branch of the Shí'a believes in twelve Imáms, of which the twelfth is said to have disappeared and expected to reappear on the Day of Judgement as the Promised One.

⁴ The Verse of the Throne [*Qur'án* 2:255]

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p9-10 and p9 footnote 2.

⁶ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p9 footnote 2 quoting *A Traveller's Narrative*, note E, p238.

⁷ The significance of the seventh Imám appearing in the dream is related to that Siyyid Kázim lived at that time in Ardibil close to the tomb of a saint that was descended from the seventh Imám. *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p9 footnote 2.

ignorant.”¹ Siyyid Kázim grasped the many profound truths in this verse, one of which may be thought of as this: The divine Trust is the soul of man, with its capacity to know and love God; and this Trust can only be actualized fully by the soul recognizing and following the Manifestation of God of the time the soul is born in. And in this day, it meant preparing for and recognizing the soon to appear Promised One.

Within a brief period, Siyyid Kázim became Shaykh Ahmad's trusted aide. Shortly after, Shaykh Ahmad left Yazd, asking his disciples to seek guidance from Siyyid Kázim. Initially, some older disciples were jealous of Siyyid Kázim, yet over time, they came to appreciate his profound knowledge and noble character.²

Shaykh Ahmad travels

Leaving Yazd, Shaykh Ahmad embarked on a journey across various regions of Persia, where he fervently propagated his teachings aimed at revitalizing Islam. His travels took him to Mashhad in the East, then north to Núr, and eventually to the capital city of Tihrán. Everywhere he went, Shaykh Ahmad was warmly welcomed and held in high esteem by many, although in certain places there were segments of the ‘ulamá’³ who did not agree with his teachings and strongly opposed him.⁴ Among his admirers was the eldest son of the reigning Sháh at the time, Fath ‘Alí Sháh.⁵ During Shaykh Ahmad's stay in Tihrán, the Sháh had a special dream affirming Shaykh Ahmad's spiritual station, prompting the Sháh to pay him a visit. In this encounter, Fath ‘Alí Sháh honoured Shaykh Ahmad as “the pride of his nation and a beacon of enlightenment for his people.”⁵

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p10; *Qur’án* 33:72

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p10-11

³ ‘ulamá’ is the Farsí word for individuals learned in Islam. It is the plural term used to refer to Islamic clergy (religious leaders). The singular is mullá.

⁴ These included Mullá Taqí-i-Baraqaání, Táhirih’s uncle [and father-in-law] in Qazvín, whose opposition feeds the anti-Shaykhí actions in Qazvín and eventually leads to Mullá Taqí being killed by a Shaykhí [DB 13-16, Section 4].

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p12



Qájár king Fath 'Alí Sháh (reigned 1798 – 1834)¹

[For Key Bábí/Bahá'í Events dates and reigns of Qájár kings, see [Resources: Qájár Dynasty & Key Bábí/Bahá'í Events.](#)]

In 1817, while Shaykh Ahmad was in Tihrán, a remarkable Child² was born, destined to alter the course of history. Shaykh Ahmad sensed the profound significance of this event when it occurred, but he knew it was not the right time to disclose this to others. So, he kept silent about it.³

¹ Archival painting from *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p6.

² Bahá'u'lláh

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p12-13

Eventually, Shaykh Ahmad left Persia to live in Karbalá'. His devoted disciples, among them Siyyid Kázim, faithfully followed him to his new home.

Shaykh Ahmad leaves Karbalá' and Siyyid Kázim is appointed as his chosen successor

Shaykh Ahmad's stay in Karbalá' was brief. He knew that his life was coming to an end and decided to spend his final days in the holy cities of Mecca and Medína. Out of love and respect, Siyyid Kázim, asked to accompany him, but Shaykh Ahmad refused his offer saying:

You have no time to lose. Every fleeting hour should be fully and wisely utilized. You should Strive day and night to rend asunder, by the grace of God and by the hand of wisdom and loving-kindness, those veils of heedlessness that have blinded the eyes of men. For verily I say, the Hour is drawing nigh, the Hour I have besought God to spare me from witnessing, for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be tremendous. You should pray to God to be spared the overpowering trials of that Day, for neither of us is capable of withstanding its sweeping force. Others, of greater endurance and power, have been destined to bear this stupendous weight.¹

Shaykh Ahmad bid farewell to Siyyid Kázim after having appointed him as his chosen successor.

Siyyid Kázim's suffering in Karbalá' and death of Shaykh Ahmad

Siyyid Kázim faced significant resistance from conservative forces, particularly the Islamic clergy, as he led the Shaykhí group from Karbalá'. The more he emphasized the imminent arrival of a new era, different from expectations, the stronger the resistance grew. Siyyid Kázim's struggles reached a point where he penned a heartfelt letter to Shaykh Ahmad, detailing the challenges and seeking clarity on when the Promised One would appear, hoping for an end to the opposition. Shaykh Ahmad replied:

Be assured of the grace of God. Be not grieved at their doings. The mystery of this Cause must needs be made manifest, and the secret of this Message must needs be divulged. I can say no more, I can appoint no time. His Cause

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p16

will be made manifest after *Hín*.  ¹ Ask me not of things which, if revealed unto you, might only pain you.²

In 1826, Shaykh Ahmad passed away in Medina and was laid to rest in the Báqí cemetery, situated not far from the revered mosque where the blessed remains of Prophet Muhammad rest.³ Siyyid Kázim was now alone with his handful of followers.

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¹ The Arabic word *Hín* is usually taken to mean “the time is nigh” but the reference here is to its numerical value. The semitic languages have an alphanumeric system, that is each alphabet is given a numerical value. Arabic uses the Abjad system. It was not unusual in the past, especially in scholarly circles, to represent a number by a word or vice versa, and sometimes interchange words that had the same numerical value. The word *Hín* has the numerical value of 68. Siyyid Kázim understood that this was referring to the year 68, which for him meant the Islamic calendar year of 1268 AH [which is 1852 CE]. The year 1852 is when Bahá’u’lláh received the intimation of His mission while imprisoned in the *Siyáh-Chál* prison in Tíhrán. This year is also referred to by the Báb as the “year nine” and discussed in [DB 25-26 Part A, Section 1](#). For more information on Islamic calendar [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí’a Islam](#). For more information on the Abjad system, see these sources: F. Lewis 1999 [Overview of the Abjad Numerological System](#) and Wikipedia [Abjad Numerals](#).

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p17-18

³ The Báqí cemetery in Medina is where a number of the Shí’a Imáms are also buried and it is close to the mosque [known as *Al-Masjid An-Nabawí* ] where the Prophet Muhammad is buried. This mosque, therefore holds profound significance in all Islam, being the second holiest site on earth after the Ka’ba in Mecca. For details [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí’a Islam](#).

Section Two: The Second Awakener

Without the presence of Shaykh Ahmad, Siyyid Kázim grappled with feelings of isolation and immense responsibility. With limited time remaining, he faced the daunting task of preparing his band of followers for the imminent advent of the Promised One. Moreover, he found himself besieged by formidable adversaries – other Shí'a leaders entrenched in their positions of power and authority. These leaders vehemently opposed the Shaykhi teachings, refusing to embrace the call for the purification of Islam, the pursuit of virtuous living, and a shift towards spiritual understanding over literal interpretations.

Geo-politics of the Middle East at the time of Siyyid Kázim

During Siyyid Kázim's lifetime, most of the Middle East was under the rule of two Islamic Empires: the Persian Qájár Empire, which had Tihrán as its capital and governed Persia, and the much larger Ottoman Empire, which had Constantinople¹ as its capital and governed much of the rest of the Middle East and parts of North Africa. The Qájár Empire ruled areas where the population was mainly Shí'a. The Ottoman Empire and the regions it ruled were mainly Sunní, except for a few small areas such as the area around Baghdad which had a large Shí'a population. These two branches of Islam were and still are often bitterly opposed to each other. This geopolitical landscape shaped the religious and cultural dynamics of the region where Siyyid Kázim resided.

Siyyid Kázim had established his base in Karbalá', a city about 55 miles (about 86 kilometers) southwest of Baghdad. This region, although relatively close to Persia, was part of the Ottoman Empire [see map below]. It had and still has a large Shí'a population because the area holds profound significance for the Shí'a due to its association with the revered Imáms.²

¹ Istanbul, Turkey

² Most of the population in the region where the Dawn-Breakers unfolds were the branch of Shí'a Islam known as Twelver Shí'a [*Ithná-'Ashariyyih* 🗨️]. The reason they are called Twelver is because they believe in 12 Imáms. The 1st Imám was Imám 'Alí. Imám 'Alí was the cousin of the Prophet, and His foster brother. 'Alí married the Prophet's daughter, Fátima. Fátima is given a very high station especially by the Shí'a [she is seen as being Immaculate, Pure] and is usually called *Fátima-az-Zahrá* 🗨️ [*zahrá* means 'the one that shines, the radiant']. All the subsequent Imáms are the male descendants of the 1st Imám, Imám 'Alí and Fátima. The Imámate was passed on from father to usually the eldest son or surviving son. 'Alí and Fátima had two sons, Hasan & Husayn. After Imám 'Alí was assassinated [he was assassinated in Kúfa and buried in Najaf], Hasan became the 2nd



The Ottoman Empire: at its peak in 1600s [light brown shaded areas] and at its end in 1914 [dark brown shaded areas]. During the time of Siyyid Kázim, the Ottoman rule was in its last stages of decline [mostly the dark brown shaded areas].

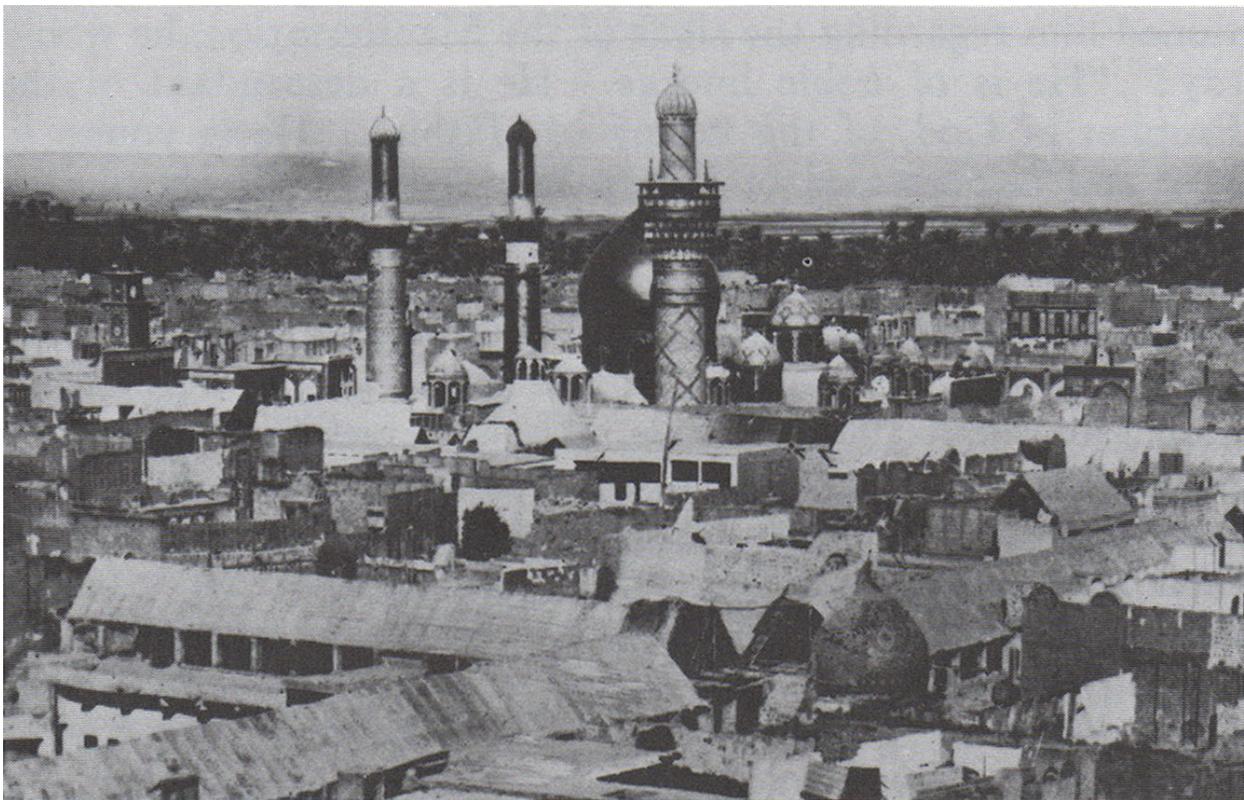
According to Shí'a belief, the Imáms ﴿﴾ are divinely appointed successors to Prophet Muhammad, serving as his earthly representatives and endowed with spiritual perfection. The region around Baghdad contains four cities of great importance to the Shí'a (Karbalá' ﴿﴾, Najaf ﴿﴾, Kázimayn ﴿﴾ and Sámarrá ﴿﴾), which they visit as pilgrims and refer to as the 'Atabát ﴿﴾.¹

Imám. After the death of Imám Hasan, Husayn became the 3rd Imám. A defining moment in Shí'a history is the martyrdom Imám Husayn together with his 72 companions in Karbalá'. Its importance to Shí'a ethos cannot be over-emphasized. After Imám Husayn, the line of Imáms continued. For the main sect of the Shí'a, this line of Imáms goes to the 12th Imám. Importantly, the Shí'a believe that the Imám's are the divinely ordained successors of the Prophet. They [the Imáms] are the viceregents of God on earth and endowed with all perfections and spiritual gifts. Every believer must turn to them and follow them. For more details [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam](#).

¹ The term 'Atabát [means thresholds] is a shortening of 'Atabāt-i-'alīyāt ﴿﴾ or 'Atabāt-i-moqaddaseh ﴿﴾ [meaning lofty thresholds or holy thresholds] which the Shí'a use to refer to collection of four cities: Karbalá', Najaf, Kázimayn and Sámarrá; all of which lie within a 100-mile radius of Baghdad. All four are extremely important for the Shí'a and sites of special visitations [zīyarat ﴿﴾] for them. Karbalá' is where Imám Husayn was martyred and is where he is buried [his tomb is in the centre of the city]. Also Imám Husayn's brother 'Abbás is buried in

Sack of Karbalá' in 1843

The Shí'a clergy of the 'Atabát coveted power and instigated unrest among their followers against the Sunnis. This was particularly notable in the area of Karbalá'. This discord prompted the Ottoman central government to dispatch a military commander, Najíb Páshá, and his forces to quell the disturbances. Recognizing Siyyid Kázim's integrity, Najíb Páshá sought his mediation, proposing that the Shí'a submit to Ottoman [Sunní] law in exchange for amnesty. However, the Shí'a clerics rebuffed this offer. In fact, they deceived both Siyyid Kázim and Najíb Páshá. The Shí'a clerics promised both Siyyid Kázim and Najíb Páshá they would yield to the Ottoman forces on a set day, but instead told their followers to prepare and start a *jihád* [a holy war] against the Ottoman forces. Najíb Páshá, became aware of



View of Karbalá' showing Shrine of Imám Husayn. Archival photo.¹

the south-east quarter of the city. Najaf is about 45 miles south of Karbalá' and is where Imám 'Alí is buried. Kúfa, where Imám 'Alí was killed, is adjacent to Najaf. Kázimayn [now essentially part of Baghdad] is across the river Tigris from Baghdád old city area and is where the 7th and 9th Imáms are buried. Sámarrá which is about 80 miles north of Baghdád is where the 10th and 11th Imáms are buried. It is also where the 12th Imám is believed to have gone into hiding [called occultation] and expected to return as the Promised One on the Day of Judgement-Resurrection. For more information [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí'a Islam](#).

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p26

their schemes, and urged for a peaceful resolution, warning of dire consequences otherwise. But this was to no avail. And so, on 10 January 1843, Najíb Páshá's forces stormed Karbalá', leading to a bloody massacre of Shí'a throughout the city. Except for the residence of Siyyid Kázim, no place was safe or a sanctuary, not even the Shrine of Imám Husayn. Hundreds gathered desperate to enter the compounds of Siyyid Kázim's house to escape the massacre. His followers even secured many neighbouring houses, and tried to use them as safe houses, but there just wasn't enough room. It is said that many died, just being trampled over, trying to get into the Siyyid Kázim safe area.¹

This incident, which historians call the 1843 Sack of Karbalá', made many in the local population realize how misled they had been by their own leaders, and also how different Siyyid Kázim was from the others. But this change in heart of the populace was late in coming, because Siyyid Kázim died soon afterwards.

Expectations of the Shí'a for the Promised One

The Shí'a hold a profound belief in and await the coming of the *Qá'im* ﴿﴾ [He Who Ariseth], which they believe will coincide with the Day of Judgement. The *Qá'im* they believe is the twelfth Imám who vanished into occultation² around 870 CE.

According to Shí'a teachings, the eleventh Imám, Hasan-al-Askarí ﴿﴾, was succeeded by his young son Muhammad, who entered concealment under the guidance of appointed representatives (Gates). This period, called the Minor Occultation, eventually transitioned into the Greater Occultation, signaling the twelfth Imám's withdrawal from the visible world. The Shí'a believe the twelfth Imám retreated to hidden cities, awaiting the Day of Judgement when he will resurface as the *Qá'im*, accompanied by a formidable force. The prophecies foretell a cataclysmic battle, where mountains will crumble, stars will fall, and the *Qá'im* will emerge triumphant. In this momentous event, Imám Husayn and all the other Imáms will return, the dead will rise, and God's dominion will be established eternally on earth. This is what Shí'a Muslims expect to happen literally at the coming of the Promised One.³

¹ Dawn-Breakers Chapter 2, p34-37.

² Meaning concealment [and believed to reappear on the Day of Judgement as the *Qá'im*].

³ The Shí'a have many titles for the *Qá'im* [He Who Ariseth] including: the 12th Imám, *Sáhib-u-Zamán* ﴿﴾ [Lord of the Age], *Hujjatu'lláh* ﴿﴾ [Proof of God], *Bagiyyatu'lláh* ﴿﴾ [Remnant of God], *Imám-Mahdí* ﴿﴾ [the Rightly Guided One], *Qá'im-i-Ál-Muhammad* ﴿﴾ [He who shall arise of the family of Muhammad] and many more. To the Shí'a, the *Qá'im* is the return of the 12th Imám who had disappeared [they say gone into occultation]. The 11th Imám was Hasan-al-Askarí who died in 260 AH, and at that point his son, named Muhammad who was 5 years old

The Sunnī do not believe in the Imáms but have similar literal cataclysmic expectations of the Day of Judgement and coming of two Great Figures.¹ Such centuries old beliefs and worldviews were what Siyyid Kázim had to train his disciples to overcome.

Signs of the Promised One given by Siyyid Kázim

Siyyid Kázim's teachings evolved over time, as he endeavored to prepare his disciples for the imminent advent of the Promised One. His guidance grew increasingly direct, emphasizing the immediacy of the *Qá'im*'s arrival.

Contrary to Shí'a belief, Siyyid Kázim asserted that the *Qá'im* would not emerge from the mythical underground cities of Jábulqá or Jábulsá, but rather from among the people themselves. Describing the characteristics of the Promised One, Siyyid Kázim taught that the *Qá'im* would be:

- a descendant of the Prophet (that is, a Siyyid),
 - between 20 and 30 years old,
 - of medium stature,
 - devoid of bodily imperfections,
 - abstaining from smoking,
 - adorned with deep piety,
- and most importantly,
- possessing innate knowledge (meaning knowledge that is inspired/derived from God and not acquired through learning from schools)

becomes the 12th Imám. Immediately after Hasan-al-Askari's death [it is believed he was poisoned], his main representative said that to keep the 5-year-old 12th Imám safe, the child was going to go into hiding, and would only communicate with everyone through this representative, who was given the title of Gate [*Báb*] to the Imám. Before this 1st Gate died, he appointed another "Gate", and this continued until the 4th Gate. This period is known as the "Minor Occultation" of the 12th Imám, when the only communication with the Imám was via the Gates. The 4th Gate on his deathbed did not appoint anyone else and said that the 12th Imám is now going to go away from the world [called the "Greater Occultation"] until the Last Days. According to Shí'a historians the 12th Imám went down an underground tunnel in the town of Surra-man-Ra'á [*Sámarrá*] in 329 AH to the hidden cities of Jábulqá and Jábulsá and still lives there. Surra-man-Ra'á [*Sámarrá*] is an ancient city north of Baghdad.

The Shí'a believe that on the Day of Resurrection/Arising [*Yawm al- Qiyámah* 🗣️], the 12th Imám or *Qá'im* will return together with a force of warriors. Then there will ensue a great battle, mountains will crumble, the stars will fall and the *Qá'im* will be victorious. Then Imám Husayn will come [together with the other Imáms] and the dead will arise, and God's Day will finally be established on the whole earth forever.

¹ The Sunnī also expect a cataclysmic Day of Resurrection/Judgement and the coming of two Great Figures. For the Sunnī, they await the appearance of the *Mahdí* [means the "Rightly Guided One"] together with the return of Jesus Christ on the Last Days.

Siyyid Kázim humbly acknowledged his own limitations in comparison, stating:

“His learning is derived from God, not from the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad, but from God. My knowledge is but a drop compared with the immensity of His knowledge, my attainments a speck of dust in the face of the wonders of His grace and power. Nay immeasurable is the difference.”¹

These characteristics of the Promised One that Siyyid Kázim described were all derived from the *hadíth*² attributed to the holy Imáms.

Siyyid Kázim told many of his disciples that they would live to see the Promised One, but he warned them that in spite of all the preparation and signs, they would “... behold Him with your own eyes, and yet recognize Him not.”³ This came to pass. Nabíl tells how this unfolds for Shaykh Hasan, one of Siyyid Kázim’s disciples from Zunúz , a small town in northeastern Persia,⁴ [his full name was Shaykh Hasan-i-Zunúzí ]. Shaykh Hasan told Nabíl how he was greatly attached to Siyyid Kázim. He even used to think that maybe Siyyid Kázim himself was the *Qá’im* and he was just covering it up until the time was right to tell everyone. But then Shaykh Hasan saw how displeased Siyyid Kázim became when one of the other disciples said a similar thing. So, he was praying every night that God would help him understand and recognize the *Qá’im*. It was during this period that the following incident occurred.⁵

Siyyid Kázim meets the Youth with the green turban: “A drink of pure beverage shall their Lord give them.”

Shaykh Hasan recounts:

One day at the hour of dawn, I was suddenly awakened by Mullá Naw-rúz, one of his [Siyyid Kázim’s] intimate attendants, who, in great excitement, bade me arise and follow him. We went to the house of Siyyid Kázim, where we found him fully dressed, wearing his ‘*abá* [cloak], and ready to leave his

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p25

² Also called Traditions, the *hadíth* are oral sayings attributed to the Prophet Mohammad and the Imáms and given very high importance – second only to the *Qur’án*. For more details on *hadíth* [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí’a Islam](#).

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p25

⁴ Zunúz [nowadays called Zonuz] is a town about 100 km [about 60 miles] northwest of Tabríz which is in the northwestern part of Írán.

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p25

home. He asked me to accompany him. "A highly esteemed and distinguished Person," he said, "has arrived. I feel it incumbent upon us both to visit Him." The morning light had just broken when I found myself walking with him through the streets of Karbalá'. We soon reached a house, and at its door stood a Youth, as if expectant to receive us. He wore a green turban (signifying that He was a Siyyid, a descendant of the Prophet), and His face revealed an expression of humility and kindness which I can never describe.

He quietly approached us, extended His arms towards Siyyid Kázim, and lovingly embraced him. His affability and loving-kindness singularly contrasted with the sense of profound reverence that characterized the attitude of Siyyid Kázim towards Him. Speechless and with bowed head, he received the many expressions of affection and esteem with which that Youth greeted him.

We were soon led by Him to the upper floor of that house, and entered a chamber bedecked with flowers and redolent of the loveliest perfume. He bade us be seated. We knew not, however, what seats we actually occupied, so overpowering was the sense of delight which seized us. We observed a silver cup which had been placed in the centre of the room, which our youthful Host, soon after we were seated, filled to overflowing, and handed to Siyyid Kázim saying: "A drink of pure beverage shall their Lord give them."¹ Siyyid Kázim held the cup with both hands and quaffed it. A feeling of reverent joy filled his being, a feeling which he could not suppress. I too was presented with a cupful of that beverage, though no words were addressed to me. All that was spoken at that memorable gathering was the above-mentioned verse of the *Qur'an*. Soon after, the Host arose from His seat and, accompanying us to the threshold of the house, bade us farewell. I was mute with wonder, and knew not how to express the cordiality of His welcome, the dignity of His bearing, the charm of that face, and the delicious fragrance of that beverage. How great was my amazement when I saw my teacher quaff without the least hesitation that holy draught from a silver cup, the use of which, according to the precepts of Islam, is forbidden to the faithful. I could not explain the motive which could have induced the Siyyid to manifest such

¹ *Qur'an* 76:21

profound reverence in the presence of that Youth - a reverence which even the sight of the shrine of the *Siyyidu'sh-Shuhadá'* ¹ had failed to excite.²

The Youth with the green turban: “Lo, the Truth is more manifest than the ray of light that has fallen upon that lap!”

Shaykh Hasan continues the story:

Three days later I saw the same Youth arrive and take His seat in the midst of the company of the assembled disciples of Siyyid Kázim. He sat close to the threshold, and with the same modesty and dignity of bearing I had witnessed before listened to the discourse of Siyyid Kázim. As soon as his eyes fell upon that Youth, the Siyyid discontinued his address and held his peace.

Whereupon one of his disciples begged him to resume the argument which he had left unfinished. “What more shall I say?” replied Siyyid Kázim, as he turned his face toward the Youth. “Lo, the Truth is more manifest than the ray of light that has fallen upon that lap!” I immediately observed that the ray to which the Siyyid referred had fallen upon the lap of that same Youth whom we had recently visited.

“Why is it,” that questioner enquired, “that you neither reveal His name nor identify His person?” To this Siyyid Kázim replied by pointing his finger to his own throat, implying that were he to divulge His name, they would both be put to death.

I had already heard my teacher observe that so great is the perversity of this generation, that were he to point out with his finger the Promised One and say: “He indeed is the Beloved, the Desire of your hearts and mine,” they would still fail to recognize and acknowledge Him. I saw the Siyyid actually point out with his finger the ray of light that had fallen on that lap, and yet none among those who were present seemed to apprehend its meaning.³

“O God, my God, my Beloved, my heart’s Desire”

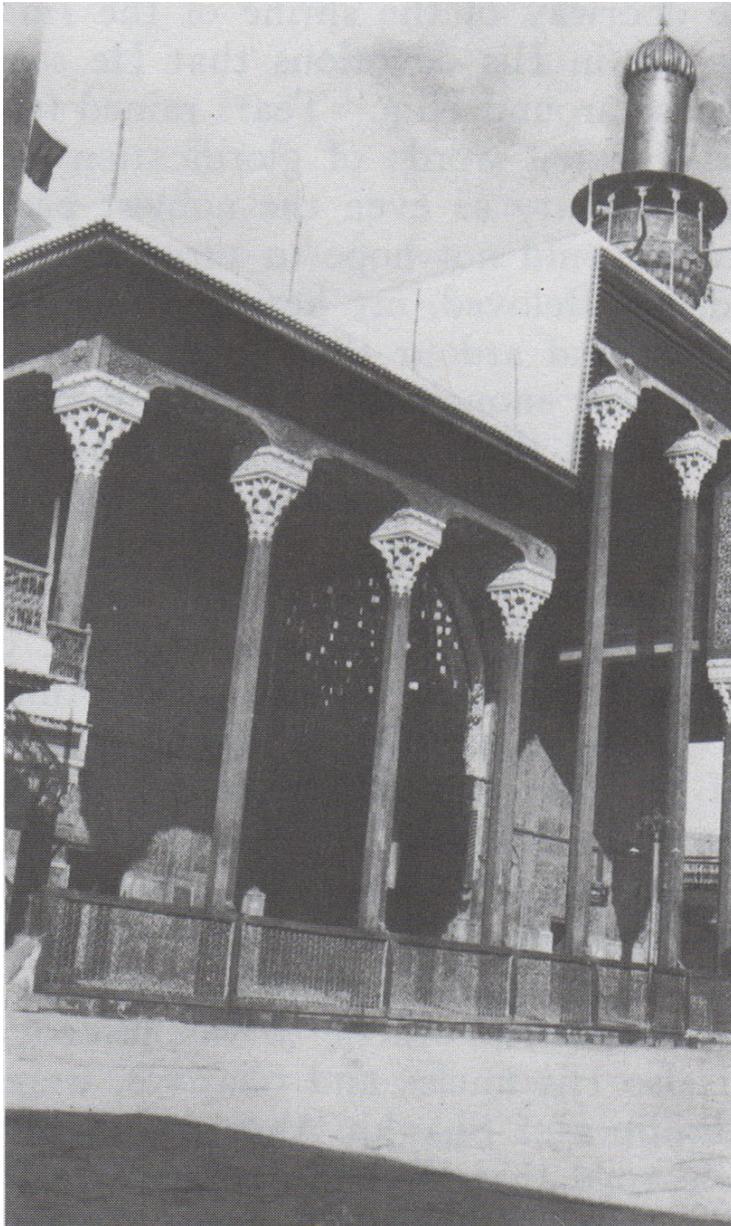
Over the days that follow, Shaykh Hasan sees this Youth several times at the shrine of Imám Husayn praying. But like everything else about Him, even His praying was

¹ Reference to Imám Husayn

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p 25-27

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p28-29

different. Shaykh Hasan relates that the Youth would stand at the doorway of the shrine of Imám Husayn wrapt in devotion, oblivious of anyone else around Him. Tears would rain from His eyes, and if you were close to Him, you could hear words of glorification and praise of such power and beauty which cannot be matched by the noblest passages from any Scripture. He epitomized true adoration. Anyone who was close to Him, was mesmerized by Him, such that without control you were moved to tears. And having finished His prayers, the Youth would leave quietly



Karbalá': Shrine of Imám Husayn. Archival photo.¹

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p29

without interacting with anyone else. Shaykh Hasan tried several times to approach Him, but every time he took a step forward towards the Youth, there seemed to be a force which prevented him from going further. And then after some days, the Youth was gone.¹

Shaykh Hasan's heart was aflame with an indescribable attraction to this Youth. The memory of the vision of Him praying haunted Hasan. He often remembered one line of an invocation the Youth repeated: "O God, my God, my Beloved, my heart's Desire."²

Shaykh Hasan felt like his soul was somehow mysteriously bonded with this Youth. In the days that followed, Siyyid Kázim often said to Shaykh Hasan: "You have been privileged to attain the day of Shaykh Ahmad, you have been closely associated with me, and in the days to come, yours shall be the inestimable joy of beholding what eye hath not seen, ear heard not, nor any heart conceived."³ Shaykh Hasan knew that Siyyid Kázim meant that he, Shaykh Hasan, would personally see the revelation of the *Qá'im*.

After Siyyid Kázim's death, Shaykh Hasan's internal compass was this promise of Siyyid Kázim to him. Time passed, and then one day Shaykh Hasan heard that a Youth from Shíráz had raised the call, that He was the *Qá'im*. Immediately, the vision of the gentle mannered, dignified Youth in the green turban in Karbalá' flashed in Shaykh Hasan's mind, and he realized that this must be the *Qá'im*.⁴ And it was. Shaykh Hasan will not only recognise and accept the Báb as the *Qá'im*, but in fact become His amanuensis [scribe and secretary] for an extended period during the Báb's travels and imprisonment. The story of Shaykh Hasan, his work as the Báb's amanuensis, and the Báb's prophecy to him that he would meet Bahá'u'lláh and how it came true is described by Nabíl in the Dawn-Breakers.⁵

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p30

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p30

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p29-30

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p30

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p29-33. Also see Portraits: Shaykh Hasan-i-Zunúzí

Section Three: The First Crossing of the Bridge of Sirát

Towards the end of his days, Siyyid Kázim would repeatedly declare words such as these:

The Promised One lives in the midst of this people. The appointed time for His appearance is fast approaching. Prepare the way for Him, and purify yourselves so that you may recognize His beauty. Not until I depart from this world will the day-star of His countenance be revealed. It behooves you after my departure to arise and seek Him. You should not rest for one moment until you find Him. ¹

Because he knew the Promised One was nigh, Siyyid Kazim refused to appoint a long-term successor.

Death of Siyyid Kázim

On 26 November 1842, Siyyid Kázim arrived at a mosque called Masjid-i-Baráthá ², which lies between Baghdád ³ and Kázimayn ⁴. He was going from Karbalá' to Kázimayn to visit the shrines of the seventh and ninth Imáms. It was time for the noon-day prayer. He stood beneath the shade of a palm tree finishing his prayers when suddenly an Arab shepherd appeared. Without any hesitation, the shepherd approached Siyyid Kázim, embraced him, and said:

Three days ago, while shepherding, I fell asleep and, in my dream, I saw the Apostle of God, our blessed Prophet Muhammad. He addressed me these words: "Go to the Masjid-i-Baráthá in exactly three days from today. You will find a scion of My house, one of my noble descendants, Siyyid Kázim, there with his companions in the shade of the palm tree praying. Tell him from Me: "Rejoice for the hour of your departure is at hand. After your visit to Kázimayn, when you return to Karbalá', on the third day of your return, which is the day of 'Arafih, you will wing your flight to Me. Know that soon after that shall He Who is the Truth be made manifest. Then shall the world be illuminated by the light of His Face. Rejoice for your work here is done." ³

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 8, p166

² *masjid* means mosque, and the *-i-* means - of -

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p43-44

Upon hearing this shepherd's story, Siyyid Kázim became joyful. His companions, however, were filled with sorrow. Siyyid Kázim soothed them saying: "Is not your love for me for the sake of that True One whose advent we all await? Would you not wish me to die, that He may be revealed?"¹

Siyyid Kázim calmly and happily completed his visit to Kázimayn and returned to Karbalá' whereupon he immediately fell ill. As foretold in shepherd's dream, three days later, on 31 December 1843, he died.² He was buried in Karbalá' close to the shrine of Imám Husayn.

Siyyid Kázim's final instructions

In the almost fifteen years since Shaykh Ahmad's death,³ Siyyid Kázim had done everything he could to prepare his disciples for the coming of the Promised One. But he also knew that although his disciples were eager, the road to recognizing the Promised One wasn't going to be easy. It would require humility and detachment from everything. It would require spiritual vision and courage to fight one's own limitations and ego. Nabíl records that the disciples of Siyyid Kázim related that during the last days of his life:

... repeatedly and emphatically, Siyyid Kázim had bidden them quit their homes, scatter far and wide, purge their hearts from every idle desire, and dedicate themselves to the quest of Him to whose advent he had so often alluded. "He told us," they said, "that the Object of our quest was now revealed. The veils that intervened between you and Him are such as only you can remove by your devoted search. Nothing short of prayerful endeavour, of purity of motive, of singleness of mind, will enable you to tear them asunder."⁴

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p45

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p44-45 and p44 footnote 1

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 1, p18 states death of Shaykh Ahmad occurred in 1242 AH (which is 1826 CE).

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p47-48

The Bridge of Sirát

There is well-known *hadīth* ¹ that says that on the Day of Resurrection, when the Promised One arises, a bridge will appear that will be thinner than a strand of hair and sharper than a sword. Below it the fires of hell will rage. All must cross that bridge to reach the Promised One. This bridge is called the Bridge of Sirát ¹.

Siyyid Kázim's teachings imparted a revolutionary understanding that the Bridge and the Resurrection were not physical occurrences but rather spiritual journeys. While many held onto the belief of the physical interpretation of these concepts, a few amongst the disciples of Siyyid Kázim who were spiritually attuned properly understood their metaphorical nature and application.



Painting depicting Day of Resurrection and the Bridge of Sirát. From *Falnameh*: India, 1610-1630.

¹ Also called Traditions, the *hadīth* are oral sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and the Imáms and given very high importance – second only to the Qur’án. For more details on *hadīth* [see Resources: Brief Background on Shí’a Islam](#).

For those with true comprehension, the passing of Siyyid Kázim marked the emergence of the first segment of this symbolic Bridge. The challenge ahead lay in navigating the myriad tests of ego and blindness, transcending earthly attachments and illusions to successfully traverse this initial stage. Only those who could withstand these trials with humility and insight would progress along the path towards the recognition of the Promised One.

How many of Siyyid Kázim's disciples would make it across the first part of the Bridge? Which ones would survive?

Mullá Husayn of Bushrúyih

Like his master, Shaykh Ahmad, Siyyid Kázim could discern the inner workings of the heart of each of his disciples. He could foresee their spiritual potential and the path they would take. He demonstrated particular confidence in one young student named Muhammad Husayn ^{﴿﴾}.

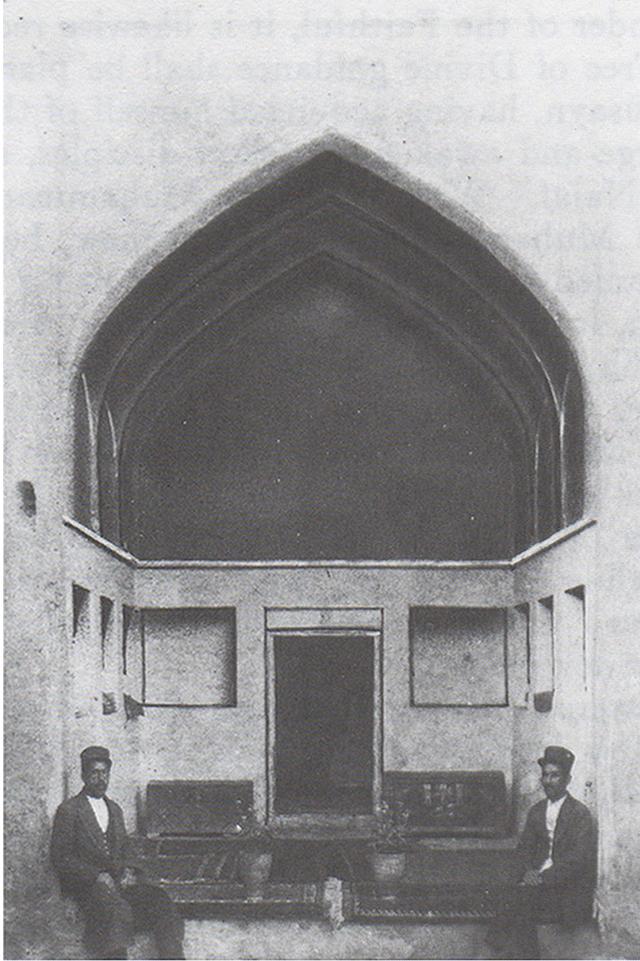
Muhammad Husayn was born in 1813 to a relatively well-to-do family in a hamlet close to the town of Bushrúyih ^{﴿﴾}, in the Khurásán province in Írán. His father was a cloth dyer who also owned a small tract of land. When he was twelve, Husayn was sent to a *madrasa* ^{﴿﴾} (religious school)¹ in Mashhad to study the *Qur'án* and *Usulí* ^{﴿﴾} Islamic law.² After Mashhad, he continued his studies in the city of Isfáhán ^{﴿﴾}. By the age of twenty-one, he was declared to be a *mujtahid*³ and generally known as Mullá Husayn-i-Bushrú'í ^{﴿﴾}.⁴ [Note: For a short description of how Fársí names are constructed [see Resources: Fársí Names & Transliteration](#)].

¹ *madrasa* [in Arabic] and *madrisih* [in Fársí] means "school" but meant religious school in the 1800s.

² There are different schools of interpretations of Shí'a Islamic law. The two major ones in Twelver Shí'a [*Ithná-'Ashariyyih*] in Írán were: *Usulí* and *Akhbarí*, with the *usulí* school being in the majority. These schools sometimes bitterly oppose each other. The Shaykhí school would be considered a minor school different from the two main ones.

³ *Mujtahid* means someone who is learned in Islamic law. To become a mujtahid, one has to study Islamic law under other senior learned mujtahids [studies can take many years]. The person is eventually granted the status of a mujtahid allowing them to be an authority to practice Islamic law. A mujtahid can issue fatwas [authorized legal opinions]. They further can take on and train other students, preach in the mosques and head congregations.

⁴ Details of Mullá Husayn's background see *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 4, p156-159; Merabkhani *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn* Chapters 1-2' p1-14.



Mullá Husayn's family home in Bushrúyih. Archival photo.¹

While studying in Mashhad [🔊], Mullá Husayn had learned about Siyyid Kázim and joined a group of students of the Shaykhi teachings. In 1835, along with his brother and nephew, Mullá Husayn set out for Karbalá'. There, all three men became Siyyid Kázim's students. The Siyyid paid particular attention to Mullá Husayn and sent him on missions throughout the country to debate with prominent Shí'a clerics to win their support for the beliefs of Shaykhism.

One such mission was to Isfáhán [🔊] to meet a renowned and powerful cleric, Hájí Siyyid Muhammad Báqir-i-Shaftí [🔊]². Before selecting Mullá Husayn for this assignment, Siyyid Kazim asked his disciples if any wanted to take on this challenge.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p49

² *Amanat Resurrection & Renewal* Chapter 6, p266

Only one student, Mírzá Muhít of Kirman¹ expressed interest in going. But Siyyid Kázim knew this man was not of pure heart and intent and rejected his offer with this warning: “Beware of touching the lion’s tail.” Then he turned to Mullá Husayn and said: “Arise and perform this mission, for I declare you equal to this task.” Mullá Husayn jumped to his feet, kissed the hem of his teacher’s robe, pledged his loyalty and immediately set off for Isfáhán.²



Persia/Írán in the 1800s [certain towns/areas of interest highlighted].³

¹ Generally known as Mírzá Muhít-i-Kirmaní. He will turn out to be a power-seeking self-centered person, who not only does not seek the Promised One but turns against Him. See more of his story in [DB 4-7, Section 4](#).

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p20

³ Map from *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal*, opposite title page. Highlighting of certain locations added.

Mullá Husayn convinces the great cleric Hájí Siyyid Muhammad Báqir-i-Shaftí¹

Mullá Husayn journeyed more than 600 miles from Karbalá' to Isfáhán and went directly to Shaftí's residence upon his arrival. There, amid great pomp and riches, and adoring students, stood the cleric delivering his lecture. Undisturbed by his own dusty and travel-ragged clothes, Mullá Husayn made his way to the front of the assemblage near the podium. There, without fear or hesitation, Mullá Husayn interrupted Siyyid Muhammad Báqir, and in a loud voice said: "Hearken, O Siyyid, to my words, for response to my plea will ensure the safety of the Faith of the Prophet of God, and refusal to consider my message will cause it grievous injury."² The assembly was shocked at Mullá Husayn's behaviour and immediately rose up against him. Siyyid Muhammad Báqir, however, was touched by this youth's sincerity. He stopped his students and asked Mullá Husayn to continue.

Mullá Husayn asked the Siyyid if he had any questions about Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kázim's teachings. Then, to the astonishment of his audience, without hesitation Mullá Husayn responded to each question the Siyyid raised with cogent and convincing arguments. They continued until sundown and the call to prayer when the Siyyid invited Mullá Husayn to return the next day for further discussion. This simply dressed dust-covered youth had amazed everyone by his knowledge and insight. Mullá Husayn returned the next day and continued to answer Siyyid Muhammad Báqir's questions. The Siyyid was so impressed by Mullá Husayn's answers that he immediately wrote a declaration which acknowledged that the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kázim about Islam were profound and correct. As well, he paid tribute to Mullá Husayn's character and knowledge. Siyyid Muhammad Báqir signed his declaration and gave it to Mullá Husayn to take back to his teacher.³

As soon as Mullá Husayn departed, the Siyyid had one of his trusted attendants follow him to find out where he was staying. The attendant watched Mullá Husayn

¹ Also known as Hájí Siyyid Muhammad Báqir-i-Rashtí

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p20

³ The Báb refers to this incident in the *Dalá'il-i-Sab'ih* [the "Seven Proofs"] which was revealed when the Báb when He was incarcerated in Máh-Kú. The Báb praising Mullá Husayn writes in this tablet [provisional translation]: "When he came to Isfáhán, the urchins of the town cried out as he passed, 'Ah! Ah! A ragged student has arrived!' But behold! This man by his proofs and arguments convinced a Siyyid, one known for his proven scientific knowledge, Muhammad Báqir. Truly that is one of the proofs of this manifestation" *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p23, footnote 5.

as he entered a simple *madrasa*¹ dorm that had no furniture, only a worn-out mat. He observed Mullá Husayn praying and then going to sleep on the thin floor mat covered only by his '*abá*' (cloak).

When Siyyid Muhammad Báqir heard this report, he sent the attendant back to Mullá Husayn with a gift of a hundred *túmáns* (a large sum of money at that time) and sincere apologies for not extending worthy hospitality. When the attendant tried to give Mullá Husayn the money he smiled and said: "Return this money to your master and tell him that his real gift to me is the spirit of fairness with which he received me, and the open-mindedness which prompted him, despite his exalted rank, to respond to the message which I, a lowly stranger, brought to him." Then he quoted this verse from the *Qur'án*: "We nourish your souls for the sake of God; we seek from you neither recompense nor thanks."² Mullá Husayn added: "My prayer for your master is that earthly leadership may never hinder him from acknowledging and testifying to the Truth." With these words, Mullá Husayn departed.³ This great cleric of Isfáhán Hájí Siyyid Muhammad Báqir remained a staunch supporter of Siyyid Kázim for the rest of his days. Sadly, he died before the declaration of the Promised One.⁴

Acts like this distinguished Mullá Husayn from other students of Siyyid Kázim. Even before this trip, Siyyid Kázim had permitted Mullá Husayn to answer questions on his behalf and to have his own students.

Mullá Husayn arrives in Karbalá' after Siyyid Kázim's death

Upon hearing the news of Siyyid Kázim's death, Mullá Husayn set off for Karbalá'. He arrived on January 22, 1844, three weeks after the passing of his teacher.⁵ He summoned Siyyid Kázim's disciples and asked what his final instructions were. They said that Siyyid Kázim had told them to leave their homes and scatter far and wide

¹ *madrasa* [in Arabic] and *madrisih* [in Fársí] means "school" but meant religious school in the 1800s.

² *Qur'án* 76:9.

³ The Báb refers to this incident in the *Dalá'il-i-Sab'ih* [the "Seven Proofs"] which was revealed by the Báb when He was incarcerated in Máh-Kú. The Báb praising Mullá Husayn writes in this tablet [provisional translation]: "When he came to Isfáhán, the urchins of the town cried out as he passed, 'Ah! Ah! A ragged student has arrived!' But behold! This man by his proofs and arguments convinced a Siyyid, one known for his proven scientific knowledge, Muhammad Báqir. Truly that is one of the proofs of this manifestation" *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p23, footnote 5.

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p22-24

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p47

in search of the Promised One. Siyyid Kázim had also been clear that the Promised One was hidden by veils, and only their earnest search and purity of heart would lead them to Him. Then Mullá Husayn asked: “Why is it then that you have not dispersed and begun your search?” The students acknowledged that they had failed to obey Siyyid Kázim but added: “To your greatness we bear witness. Such is our confidence in you, that if you claim to be the Promised One, we shall all readily and unquestionably submit.” “God forbid,” exclaimed Mullá Husayn. “Far be it from His glory that I who am but dust, should be compared to Him.” Mullá Husayn addressed each of Siyyid Kázim’s disciples individually and impressed upon them their duty to carry out his instructions. Most, however, made excuses as to why they couldn’t leave Karbalá’ and search for the Promised One.¹

Mullá Husayn and his companions begin their search

Mullá Husayn decided that he couldn’t wait any longer for the others. Without another word, he set off with his brother and his nephew. Their first destination was the special mosque in Kúfa ^(📍), which is about 45 miles south of Karbalá ^(📍).² This mosque holds special significance for the Shí’a, as it was in this mosque that in January 661, the Imám Alí had been killed by a poisoned sword.³ At this mosque, Mullá Husayn and his companions commenced a forty-day spiritual retreat called an *’itikāf* ^(📍) in which they fasted and prayed from sunrise to sunset. They had taken the first step of their quest to find the Promised One, readily crossing the first part of the metaphoric Bridge of Sirát.

Mullá Husayn and his two companions become the first group of seekers to set out in search of the Promised One. We will shortly see [next section] that they will soon be followed by a few others, who will with them become the first eighteen souls to make it across the first part of the Bridge, recognizing the Promised One.

Prominent Siyyid Kázim disciples who do not make the First Crossing

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p48

² Kúfa is besides Najaf. In January 661 CE, Imám Alí was killed by a poisoned sword while he was praying at this mosque in Kúfa. He is buried in neighbouring town of Najaf.

³ The mosque in Kúfa holds special significance for the Shí’a because this is where the Imám ‘Alí was assassinated with a poisoned sword in January 661 CE. The *Shaykhi*’s had the practice of special spiritual retreats called an *’itikāf* in which they go into isolation and fast and prayed from sunrise to sunset usually for 40 days, and these are believed to have special potency when conducted at certain holy sites. One of these holy sites for an *’itikāf* is this mosque in Kúfa.

History documents a diverse array of outcomes among Siyyid Kázim's disciples as they confronted the challenge of crossing the symbolic Bridge. While some successfully traversed this initial phase, demonstrating profound insight and spiritual growth, others faltered. Many are the reasons that a soul does not make it across the symbolic Bridge. Among those who failed to make it across were individuals who, despite their apparent knowledge and prominence, succumbed to the allure of power, allowing their egos to overshadow their spiritual aspirations, leading them down a path of darkness and corruption. Others did not make it across because they remained entrenched in their fear of change, clinging to their comfort zones, and resisting transformation. Ultimately for each individual, it is their particular choices that determine the outcome of the crossing for them.

Tragically, certain disciples not only failed to cross the Bridge but also actively opposed the emergence of the Promised One, leading others astray through their misguided teachings and actions. Such was the case with three individuals: Muhammad-Karím (ﷺ), Hasan-i-Gawhar (ﷺ) and Mírzá Muhít of Kirmán (ﷺ), all of whom were among the prominent disciples of Siyyid Kázim, and all attempted to grab the leadership role of the Shaykhi movement after Siyyid Kázim's death.¹

The first of these, Muhammad-Karím (also known as Muhammad-Karím Khán-i-Kirmání (ﷺ)), was self-centered and egotistical, and attempted to seize power from Siyyid Kázim even when the Siyyid was alive. Shaykh Abú-Turáb (ﷺ), who was married to Mullá Husayn's sister, and a close disciple of Siyyid Kázim,² recounted this story about Muhammad-Karím:

One day, I was alone in the library with Siyyid Kázim, when an attendant of Muhammad-Karím arrived with a book. Muhammad-Karím had been making arrangements to go to Kirmán and establish a Shaykhi school there. His attendant presented the book to Siyyid Kázim on behalf of his master, requesting him to read it and signify his approval by signing it. Siyyid Kázim briefly glanced through the book and returned it to the attendant with these words: "Tell your master that he, better than anyone else, can estimate the value of his own work." When the attendant left, Siyyid Kázim said with great sadness: "Accursed be he! For years he has associated with me, and now he has arranged with several self-seeking other hypocrites to establish himself in Kirman, and after I am gone to take over my position. He will try and even

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p39

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p39 footnote 1. Nabíl describes how Shaykh Abú-Turáb becomes a Bábí and eventually is imprisoned in the prison of Síyáh-Chál in Tihrán and dies a martyr [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p40].

go against the Promised One, but I assure you that eventually he will fail. The breeze of Divine Revelation will blow out his light and destroy his imagined influence. You will see this.”¹

That is exactly what happened. After Siyyid Kázim’s passing, Muhammad-Karím declared himself head of the Shaykhís and established a large following at his base in Kirmán. He got the power and glory he wanted and was even acknowledged by the Sháh. However, when the Báb wrote to him and invited him to recognize the new Revelation, not only did he reject it, but he also wrote two treatises against the Báb, one of which was at the special request of the king Násirí’-d-Dîn Sháh . In the end, his efforts came to nothing, and he died a lost soul.

Hasan-i-Gawhar was the second of the three prominent disciples who turned away from Siyyid Kázim’s teachings. Evidently, Siyyid Kázim had said that he could head up the group after Siyyid Kázim’s passing, but only for forty-five days because the Promised One was nigh.² Hasan-i-Gawhar now made excuses to Mullá Husayn as to why he couldn’t leave to search for the Promised One. He remained in Karbalá’ where he actively competed to become head of the Shaykhís, but his efforts came to naught, and he died a dejected soul.

The third of these prominent disciples, Mírzá Muhít of Kirmán, was not only self-seeking but also perhaps the most cowardly. Remember, he had asked Siyyid Kázim if he could go to Isfáhán as his representative to visit that powerful cleric but instead of granting his wish Siyyid Kázim had given him a warning not to touch “the lion’s tail.” Mírzá Muhít thought of himself as a leader of the Shaykhís and pretended to be searching for the truth. In reality, he was full of pride and ego to the end of his days. We shall come across him again³ when he meets the Báb in Mecca, poses questions to Him, and receives answers but refuses to recognize the Báb. In later years, he pretends to be interested in meeting Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad in his search for truth, but again turns away. Mírzá Muhít died a miserable soul.

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 2, p39-40

² *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 4, p154.

³ See DB4-7, Section 4.

Section Four: The First Wave of Seekers

The select few disciples of Siyyid Kázim who became the first wave of eighteen seekers to cross the Bridge of Sirát exemplified extraordinary qualities that set them apart. Driven by an innate love of God and a profound detachment from worldly distractions, they displayed unwavering courage, selflessness, and spiritual insight. These qualities were needed, because their journey was far outside the norms of understanding and comfort zone of their existing world. Their path was through unknown terrain. What guided them was a deep-seated faith in the promise of God that “Whoso maketh efforts for Us, in Our ways will We guide them,”¹ a faith rooted not in blind adherence, but in a genuine exploration of spiritual truths.

Who were these first wave of seekers of the Promised One?

Mullá Husayn and his two companions

Mullá Husayn and his two companions, hailing from Bushrúyih, emerged as the vanguard in the quest for the Promised One, demonstrating unparalleled zeal and determination. We have already discussed Mullá Husayn’s background and how, he and his two companions [his brother and his young nephew] started their quest for the Promised One [see previous section].

Following closely behind them was another group of disciples of Siyyid Kázim, led by Mullá ‘Alí-i-Bastámí .

¹ *Qur’án* 29:69



Persia/Írán in the 1800s [certain towns/areas of interest highlighted]¹

Mullá Alí-y-i-Bastámí and his twelve companions

Mullá 'Alí-y-i-Bastámí (۱۱) was born in the town of Bastám (۱۱) (northeastern Írán). He studied Islamic law as a youth in Mashhad, where, like Mullá Husayn, he became a *mujtahid* and also discovered *Shaykhism*. Also, like Mullá Husayn, he moved to Karbalá' where he ultimately became a prominent disciple of Siyyid Kázim. Many felt that his knowledge and understanding was comparable to that of Mullá Husayn.

¹ Map from *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal*, opposite title page. Highlighting of certain locations added.

Shortly after Mullá Husayn and his party had left Karbalá', Mullá 'Alí assembled twelve more of Siyyid Kázim's disciples anxious to begin the search for the Promised One, based on Siyyid Kázim's instructions. All thirteen of them left Karbalá' and set out for Kúfa to join Mullá Husayn and his companions.

Táhirih

Mullá Salih-i-Baraqańı (ؑ) was a renowned *mujtahid* from Qazvın (ؑ) (city in northwestern Persia). Among his children was an exceptional daughter, born in 1817¹ and named Fátimih (ؑ) and surnamed Umm-i-Salmih (ؑ) and *Zarrın-Táj* (ؑ) (Crown of gold). She would later be given the titles by which she is better known: *Qurratu'l-'Ayn* (ؑ) (Solace of the eyes)² and *Táhirih* (ؑ) (the Pure)³.

In time, Táhirih would become famous for her beauty, her sublime poetry, her profound understanding of Islam, deep spiritual insight, and most importantly as one of the first contingent to recognize the Promised One and to grasp the implications of the realities of a new age. As such, she became a herald for the emancipation of women.

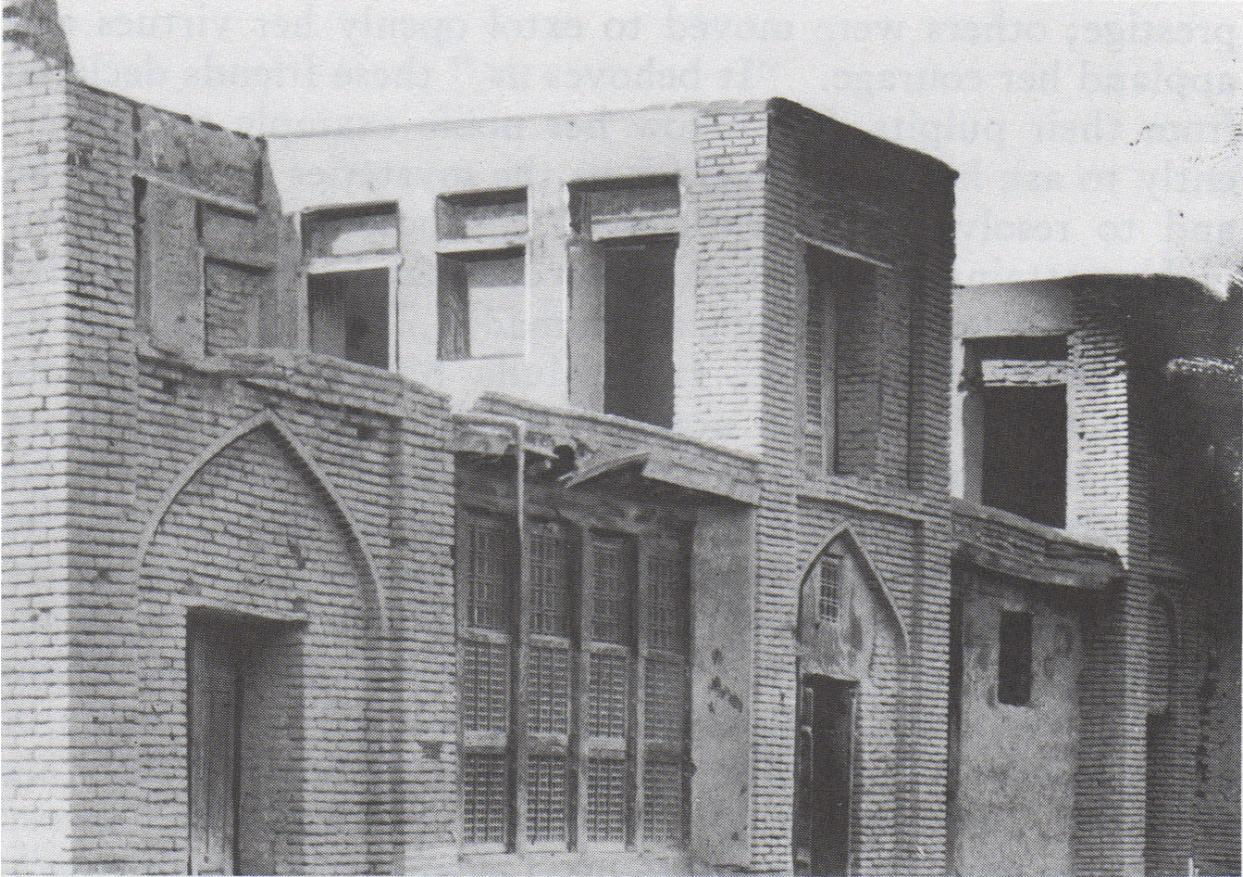
Táhirih, along with her younger sister Marzíyeh (ؑ), and her brothers, were brought up in an affluent but strictly religious environment. From early childhood she demonstrated remarkable intelligence and spiritual capacity. Instead of playing games she preferred to listen to her parents discuss religious matters. Her father was open minded unlike many men of that era. He cherished his remarkable daughter and allowed her to study Islamic theology, jurisprudence and literary sciences. Such an education, in a time and in a land where women were considered to be devoid of a soul and men's property, was unheard of.

As she grew older, Táhirih, concealed behind a curtain, would attend the religious classes of her father and uncle, along with two or three hundred male students.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 24, p 628 gives Táhirih's date of birth as 1233 AH [1817-1818 CE]; although *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 7, p295 gives her date of birth as 1231 AH [1814 CE].

² Title given to her by Siyyid Kázim by which she is commonly known in literary circles even today.

³ Title given to her by Bahá'u'lláh at the Conference of Badasht and later confirmed by the Báb [DB 13-16, Section 6].



House in Qazvín in which Táhirih lived. Archival photo.¹

She was known to publicly refute the arguments of her highly esteemed elders. “She discomfited the learned men of Persia by her brilliancy and fervor. When she entered a meeting, even the learned men of Persia were silent. She was so well versed in philosophy and science that those in her presence always considered and consulted her first...”² One of Táhirih’s brothers recounted: “None of us, her brothers or her cousins dared to speak in her presence, her learning so intimidated us.”³ Her father often lamented: “Would that she had been a boy, for he would have shed illumination upon my household, and would have succeeded me.”⁴

As was the custom then, in spite of her astonishing capacity, Táhirih was married off to her cousin when she was fourteen. In 1828, shortly after their marriage, the couple moved to Karbalá’ for Táhirih’s husband to study under a well-known *usulí*

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 15, p274

² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 2 May 1912, Talk to Federation of Women’s Clubs, Chicago

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p84-85 footnote 1.

⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Baha in *Memorials of the Faithful* [# 69] also quoted in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p81 footnote 2.

mujtahid. They lived in Karbalá' for thirteen years during which time Táhirih gave birth to two sons.¹ While living there she learned about Shaykhi teachings (and possibly attended Siyyid Kázim's lectures)². She became an ardent follower of Siyyid Kázim and corresponded with him after she returned to Qazvin in 1841. She sent him a treatise she wrote in defense of certain Shaykhi teachings. Siyyid Kázim was so pleased with it that in response he addressed her "O thou who art the solace of mine eyes (*Yá Qurrat-i--'Ayní* 🗣️) and the joy of my heart."³ Ever since then she has been known as *Qurratu'l-'Ayn* 🗣️).

More about Táhirih's family and her life events will be recounted in later sections. For now, we focus on the time of Siyyid Kázim's death. Táhirih decided to return to the Karbalá' at the end of 1843 but didn't arrive there until early 1844, shortly after Siyyid Kázim's death. The Shaykhi community in the area was in commotion, as Siyyid Kázim's disciples struggled to decide whether to stay or to go in search of the Promised One. Táhirih was one of those who took the path of search, but not physically, like some of the others. At that time in Persia, women were not allowed to travel unless they were accompanied by a close male relative, because women were considered to be property of men. Táhirih's search path was therefore through spiritual communion with the Promised One. We will pick up Táhirih's quest and what she did in the next section.

Quddús

The last of the first wave of seekers was a young man who would later be known as *Quddús* 🗣️ [the Most Holy].⁴

¹ *Amanat Resurrection & Renewal*, Chapter 7, p297 says that Táhirih's two sons' names were Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl, that both sons later became mujtahids and Ismā'īl succeeded his father as Imám jumā; and a third son, Ishāq, was born in 1841 in Qazvīn. 'Abdu'l-Baha in *Memorials of the Faithful* [section 69.1] says that Táhiirih had two sons and one daughter, none of whom recognized the truth of the Cause [also quoted in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p81 footnote 2].

² *Amanat Resurrection & Renewal*, Chapter 7, p297. Note: Abdu'l-Baha in *Memorials of the Faithful* [section 69.3] states that Táhiirih "became acquainted with the writings of Shaykh Ahmad while staying in the home of her cousin, Mullá Javád, from whose library she borrowed books and took them to her home" [this is also quoted in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p81 footnote 2]

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p83

⁴ Title given to him by Bahá'u'lláh at the Conference of Badasht and later confirmed by the Báb [DB 13-16, Section 6].

Quddús was born about 1822 to a poor family of rice cultivators in Bárfurúsh (northern Írán near the Caspian Sea).¹ At birth he was named Muhammad 'Alí. Later, when he became a *mujtahid*, he was commonly known as Mullá Muhammad 'Alí-i-Bárfurúshí. His mother was a descendant of Imám Hasan (the second Imám). Quddús spent part of his childhood as a servant in the household of a popular *Shaykhi* leader, Shari'atmadár, in Bárfurúsh, where he acquired some basic education.²



Views of Quddús' father's house in Bárfurúsh. Archival photos.³

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 24, p 628 gives Quddús' age in 1844 as 22 years old, which makes his date of birth 1822; although *Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 4, p181 calculates his date of birth as 1819-1820.

² *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 4, p181-182.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 9, p182

When Quddús was about twelve, with Sharí'atmadár's encouragement, he attended a *madrasa* [religious school]¹ in the nearby town of Sári. At fifteen, he went to Mashhad to continue his religious studies. Mullá Husayn was one of the fellow students there, as were several others who would become ardent disciples of Siyyid Kázim.² Thus began an acquaintanceship that would develop in unimaginable ways. After three years in Mashhad at about the age of eighteen, Quddús left for Karbalá' where, for the next few years, he became a part of Siyyid Kázim's inner circle.³ Quddús was described as extremely devout and humble. Nabíl records that:

He was the last to arrive, and invariably occupied the lowliest seat in the assembly. He was the first to depart upon the conclusion of every meeting. The silence he observed and his modest behaviour distinguished him from the rest of his companions.⁴

Siyyid Kázim often remarked that although certain of his disciples occupied the lowliest of seats, and observed the strictest silence, they were nonetheless so exalted in the sight of God that he himself felt unworthy to rank among their servants.⁵ At that time no one understood to whom he was referring.

During his stay in Karbalá', his companions noted how Quddús exhibited a curious affinity for the shrines of the Imáms in the 'Atabát and often observed spiritual retreats in the mosque at Kúfa.⁶ In 1843, at the age of twenty-one, Quddús returned to his hometown (Bárfurúsh) in the north of Persia and began to spread the teachings of Siyyid Kázim. As one historian noted:

The presence of a charismatic mullá like Muhammad 'Alí, with his affability, combined with dignity and bearing, and meticulous observance of religious

¹ *madrasa* [in Arabic] and *madrisih* [in Fársí] means "school" but meant religious school in the 1800s.

² *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 4, p182.

³ *Amanat Resurrection and Renewal* Chapter 4, p181-182.

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p72

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p72

⁶ *Amanat Resurrection & Renewal*, Chapter 4, p182. The mosque in Kúfa holds special significance for the Shí'a because this is where the Imám 'Alí was assassinated with a poisoned sword in January 661 CE. The *Shaykhi's* had the practice of special spiritual retreats called an *i'tikāf* in which they go into isolation and fast and prayed from sunrise to sunset usually for 40 days, and these are believed to have special potency when conducted at certain holy sites. One of these holy sites for an *i'tikāf* is this mosque in Kúfa.

rites, could hardly remain unnoticed. Whoever was intimately associated with him was seized with an insatiable admiration for the charm of the youth.¹

Quddús, was in his hometown of Bárfurúsh at the time of Siyyid Kázim's passing. He knew the momentous significance of Siyyid Kázim's death. As soon as the news reached him, Quddús set out on his quest for the Promised One.

* * * * *

¹ *Amanat Resurrection & Renewal*, Chapter 4, p183

Epilogue

Siyyid Kázim's passing marked the culmination of his and Shaykh Ahmad's tireless efforts, which had galvanized a small following across Persia. While their teachings had resonated with thousands of individuals, the majority of these followers were primarily engaged with the Shaykhí interpretation of Islamic teachings, rather than actively seeking the Promised One. Indeed, for most, the prospect of undertaking the herculean effort and sacrifices required to embark on the search for the Promised One was daunting and overwhelming.

As to those few valiant souls who took the first step to cross the metaphoric Bridge of Sirát, their journey ahead is marked by unwavering commitment, courage, and sacrifice. As we will see in the next sections, these special souls, the Letters of the Living, emerge as beacons of light, inspiring countless others to follow in their footsteps. And as to those who follow them, many are ordinary people who will rise to extraordinary levels. Through indomitable resolve and effort, through choosing to tear the veils of ignorance and illusion that ensnare others, these souls will embark on an undreamed-of path to usher in a new age for humanity. Their remarkable journey is a testament to the transformative power of sincere devotion and spiritual striving. These are the souls whose incredible story is told by Nabíl in *The Dawn-Breakers*. Their story calls on us to follow in their footsteps.

[Note: For a short background on Nabíl, his life and the writing of *The Dawn-Breakers*, see Resources: Nabíl-i-Zarandí and the Dawn-Breakers Chronicle].

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End of "DB 1-2: The Hour Before the Dawn"